



April 2003

Virtual Reality

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State of Utah

Department of Workforce Services



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Reality Town provides real living experiences for youth

by Julie Barnes, Business Consultant

Have you ever been to **Reality Town**? I have, and so have many employers in Davis County. Reality Town is a role-playing exercise where teenage students experience real life situations in a safe school environment. Reality Town was held at **North Layton Jr. High School** and many businesses in the community were involved. The students began their experience by entering a transformed gym that took on the appearance of a little town—Reality Town. Each student was given a scenario based upon their current grade point average. In the given scenario, some students are doctors; some are police officers; some are service workers; etc. All students are given a profile of themselves. Some are married with children, some are single parents and some have no children.

The first stop in Reality Town is the credit union. **America First Credit Union** provided each student with a checkbook and a current balance based upon his or her job. Next stop was the **Tax Commission** where they promptly paid taxes on their income. Then off to reality they went. They needed to buy transportation and **Young Pontiac** was there to sell them a vehicle. Of course they needed food, so they went to the **Dan's Foods** booth where they could choose from several grocery packages. The lowest priced package had lots of macaroni and cheese while the most expensive featured steak.

Layton City's mayor was there and **Layton City Police** patrolled the streets of Reality Town. If a student broke the law, they were arrested by the police and taken before the judge to pay a fine.

There was one booth called *Unexpected Events*, where students picked a card and had to deal with the unexpected event—a traffic ticket, loss of job and a serious illness were some of the unexpected events.

Tanner Clinic was there to help with medical needs, **Lowe's** was there to help with home repairs. When a student ran out of money they went to the **Department of Workforce Services' (DWS)** booth entitled *Supplemental Income*, where they reviewed a list of second jobs and tried to find one that would work with their already busy schedule. When they found a job they felt they could do, they were asked to fill out an application for the job and pick a card to see if they received the job. If the card said, "You got the job," then another income was added to their balance and off they went to the tax booth to pay taxes on their second income.

Perhaps the biggest reality was when they came to the DWS booth seeking a third job because they were in so much debt. The counselor sadly informed the student that they could not possibly work three jobs and referred them to **Consumer Credit Services** to take another look at the choices they made and offer suggestions to get out of debt and live within their means.

One of employers' greatest challenges is to find qualified applicants who are prepared for getting and keeping a job. We would like to thank North Layton Jr. High and the surrounding business community for giving these students a visit to Reality Town.

News You Can Use

Pre-Layoff Assistance

In our changing economy, millions of workers lose their jobs each year because of layoffs or other economic-related conditions. Our Dislocated Worker Unit (DWU) provides free pre-layoff assistance to employers and their affected workers when faced with a layoff situation. The overriding strategy of the DWU is to respond rapidly when layoffs are announced and deliver resources to help affected workers transition to new employment. The sooner workers start to manage the transition, the better the outcome for them and you, the employer. Studies show that the impacts of change can be smoother once your workers know that you are concerned about them.

When the DWU obtains information about a layoff, on-site Rapid Response Workshops are offered to the employer to assist the affected workers. These pre-layoff workshops include information on the following:

- Filing for Unemployment Insurance
- Other benefits and services available through the Department of Workforce Services
- Financial planning and protecting your 401(K)
- Extending health insurance under COBRA and other health insurance options
- Labor market information planning and effective job search skills
- Résumés and applications
- Interviewing techniques

For more information contact:

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jobs.utah.gov *update*

In the first four months of operation there has been a dramatic rise in the number of registered job seekers with graduate degrees. The number of applicants with master's degrees or higher has grown to almost 15 percent of total applicants. Clearly the ability to access job openings via the Internet is attracting higher skilled job seekers!

Eight Prosecuted for Unemployment Fraud

During the month of January 2003, the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) successfully prosecuted eight individuals for fraud in connection with their unemployment insurance (UI) claims. The former claimants, seven men and one woman, pled guilty to second and third degree felonies in district courts throughout the state.

"These defendants are required to pay DWS in excess of \$87,000 in overpayments and penalties," said Vince Iturbe, Manager of Benefit Payment Control. "The statutory penalties for UI fraud can double the amount actually received in benefits." In addition, sentences handed down included jail time, community service, court and attorney fees. Some of the defendants immediately made partial payments on their debt.

"We currently have 57 additional cases pending in courts throughout Utah and in other states. Investigation and court preparations continue every day. In the last several years, our methods of fraud detection have become increasingly sophisticated," said Iturbe. "The funds that pay for unemployment insurance benefits come from a tax on Utah's employers. These prosecutions are evidence of our commitment to the proper payment of benefits. Doing so protects the UI trust fund for employers and ensures that money is available to pay benefits to workers who are both eligible and honest," stated Christopher Love, UI Director.



Do you find it helpful to have the latest occupational wage information for Utah and its sub-state areas? That data comes from the yearly OES survey. If your business is surveyed, please fill out and return your form, so that we can continue to publish this very helpful wage information.

Thanks!

DWS Awards \$250,000 for Cultural Integration Grant

As Utah's workplace becomes increasingly more culturally diverse, employers are expressing concerns about how low English proficiency and communication problems are impacting their businesses. They asked Governor Leavitt for help at the State Council on Workforce Services meeting held in April 2002.

The governor responded by charging the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) to convene a Cultural Integration Advisory Committee to address those concerns. The committee's first step was to commission a telephone survey of over 1,000 randomly selected Utah employers to quantify the impacts of cultural integration and English skills issues and challenges they face.

The survey revealed that limited English proficiency had significant impacts on the workforce associated with technical capability, training, safety, the ability to advance and customer service. The survey also found that a sizable majority of employers (63 percent) would take advantage of a successful cultural integration and English skill-building program, if offered.

A \$250,000 one-year grant was awarded to Granite School District, Adult and Community Education Department on January 14, 2003. The grant will fund services that provide individualized diversity strategies and initiatives for 10 Utah employers. Services may include and are not limited to the following: adult vocational literacy, including English language skills for the limited English proficient person; employment-related cultural integration diversity training and related activities that are clearly linked to the organization's overall business goals and become part of the company's organizational practice.

"It's clear that in order to meet the objectives of Governor Leavitt's 1000-Day economic plan, we address the need of cultural diversity in the workplace," said DWS Deputy Director Darin Brush. "We hope to accomplish this in many ways; this grant is a first step to assist employers in addressing this critical need."

Ten Wasatch Front employers have been selected as participants of this cultural integration grant. While they have varying needs, all share the common philosophy that communication must be open and effective, whereby the employee will understand the company's mission, vision and values. There must be opportunities for the employee to grow and advance.

Granite will work on-site with each employer for the next year to accomplish the following:

- Employers will recognize an increase in English proficiency among a percentage of those employees chosen to participate.
- Employers will be taught employment-related cultural assimilation, which will result in employees having adequate comprehension of everyday workplace necessities. This could include training, advancement opportunities and safety.

At conclusion of the grant, the employer will be left with resources so the services provided can be replicated within the company. During the year-long grant, a model will be developed which will go statewide to all Utah employers in 2004.

For more information on the Cultural Integration Initiative, contact Barbara Darling at the Department of Workforce Services 801-526-9294.

New Wage Data for Utah Just Released!

Brand-new occupational wage data for Utah has just been posted on the DWS/Economic Information Web page. This is the most current, accurate occupational wage data available for Utah.

The main page for wage data is: <http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/Owi/wages.asp>. From there, you can click down to find wage data for both your area of the state and the state as a whole, definitions of occupational titles, and helpful links to other wage, benefit and labor law-related web pages.

There are also informative articles on geographic differences in Utah wages, national wages vs. Utah wages, information about how this wage data gets collected, and a wage conversion table (hourly to weekly, bimonthly, monthly, annually).

To all of the employers who participated in last year's *Occupational Employment Survey*, the source of this data, we extend a big "Thank You!" Without the voluntary cooperation of about 3,000 businesses statewide, we would not be able to provide this valuable data.

Utah Department of Workforce Services

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Utah's Employment Situation

Utah's monthly unemployment rate was unchanged at 5.6 percent for both December 2002 and January 2003. However, the yearly unemployment rate has changed from 5.2 percent in January 2002 to 5.6 percent in January 2003.

Raylene Ireland, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS), indicates that "On paper, the employment percentage shows no change between December and January but, in reality, it is a slight improvement. The January numbers are being compared against the employment build-up that immediately preceded last year's Olympics."

The North Region reports monthly and year-over changes. The monthly unemployment rate changed from 5.3 percent in December to 5.7 percent in January. Additionally, the year-over unemployment rate increased from 5.1 percent in January 2002 to 5.7 percent in January 2003. The northern counties included in these statistics are Davis, Morgan and Weber.

North region Unemployment rate

County	Dec. 2002	Dec. 2001
Box Elder	5.8	6.7
Cache	2.5	3.8
Davis	4.4	4.4
Morgan	3.6	4.0
Rich	4.0	3.0
Weber	5.1	5.2

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